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(14) Japan-Mekong summit: Japan aims to retain leverage

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)  
November 8, 2009

Yudai Nakazawa, Hideyuki Nishio (Bangkok)

Japan and five nations of the Mekong river region (Thailand,  
Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar) held their first Japan-Mekong  
summit in Tokyo on Nov. 6-7. At the meeting, the nations adopted a

Tokyo Declaration that includes official assistance development (ODA) worth more than 500 billion yen to be provided to the five Mekong nations by Japan over the next three years and agreed to hold the summit on a regular basis. Japan is hoping to use the summit to work toward realizing Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama's Initiative for East Asian Community in the future by supporting the development of Mekong countries. However, rivalry toward China, whose presence is growing in the Mekong River region, is also discernible in Japan's move.

Prime Minister Hatoyama, during a joint press conference with participants from the five Mekong countries held after the meeting on Nov. 7, underscored the meaning of the East Asian Community Initiative: "(The Mekong countries) form an important region that holds the key to realizing the East Asian Community Initiative in terms of how it can rectify regional disparities and achieve joint development." He has secured the participating countries' cooperation with the inclusion of the wording "(The Mekong countries) will contribute to the building of the East Asian Community as a long-term vision."

What Japan had in mind at the summit was the presence of China, which is making efforts to strengthen its ties with the Mekong nations through economic support. The prime minister indicated a stance of seeking cooperation at the Japan-China Mekong Policy Dialogue, which Japan and China established in 2008, pointing out, "It is not a matter of Japan being put at a disadvantage because of China focusing its efforts on Mekong countries. It is important for both countries to cooperate."

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Japan's presence in the region has been declining as it has reduced its ODA in recent years. All the more for that reason, the prime minister wants to regain the lost ground by demonstrating his stance of attaching importance to Asia by providing large amounts of ODA and forming of an East Asian Community.

These Mekong countries, excluding Thailand, joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the 1990s. They are known as the least developed ASEAN members. They are lagging behind in the development of transportation infrastructure, such as the building of roads, ports, harbors, and airports. They are pinning high hopes on Japan's financial support. Laotian Prime Minister Bouasone during the press conference said, "The meeting was a complete success. We would like to materialize the Tokyo Declaration by developing a detailed plan.

However, a fierce confrontation occurred between Thailand and Cambodia about former Thai Prime Minister Taksin right before the summit this time. The momentum for Indochinese nations to jointly achieve economic development is lacking due to economic disparities and differences in the political systems. The true feeling of Mekong countries is that they do not want to be involved in a leadership struggle between Japan and China.

China builds track record by moving southward

Joji Uramatsu, Beijing

Backed by its economic power, China has been strengthening its transportation links with Mekong countries and using them as stepping stones in its southward advance to Southeast Asia. The key route for its southward advance is the Kunming-Bangkok Expressway, which opened in April last year. Vice Chinese Premier Li Keqiang at the Economic Forum with ASEAN held on Oct. 20 underscored, "We will promote the building of expressways and a railway system linking China and its neighbors on a top priority basis."

China has held summit meetings with Mekong countries every three years since 2002 to discuss a Greater Mekong Area Economic Cooperation Program. It has thus built up cooperation with Mekong countries in areas other than transportation, such as electric power and communications, as well. The Kunming-Bangkok Expressway, which could be considered China's southward advance route, and the East-West highway connecting Vietnam and Myanmar, for which Japan

provides assistance, cross in the Mekong River region.

Likening the leadership battle between Japan and China to China's Warring States Period, diplomatic sources in Beijing predict that alignments among Mekong countries will progress as the Kunming-Bangkok Expressway and the East-West highway are built.

Gist of Tokyo Declaration adopted at Japan-Mekong states summit

Q Highly praise self-supporting efforts by Mekong states and welcome the role of Japan and Thailand in the region.

Q Japan and Mekong states will establish a common, prosperous new partnership for the future.

Q Mekong states will proactively contribute to the strengthening of the integration of ASEAN and the establishment of the East Asian Community as a long-term vision.

Q Japan will extend ODA worth more than 500 billion yen to the Mekong River region as a whole over the next three years.

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(15) Interview with Tokyo University Professor Shinichi Kitaoka:  
Avoid weakening the Japan-U.S. alliance

NIKKEI (Page 1) (Full)  
November 7, 2009

(Interview conducted by Hiroyuki Akita, editorial staff member)

Akita: While the Hatoyama administration advocates a "close and equal Japan-U.S. relationship," it has brought about various conflicts on such issues as U.S. military bases in Japan.

Kitaoka: The Japan-U.S. alliance is beneficial for stability in East Asia. It would be fine for Japan to upgrade its role in security to make the relationship more equal, but it is undesirable to do so by downgrading the United States' role. This will not constitute a "close and equal" relationship. East Asia has to deal with the issue of a nuclear North Korea and the challenge of China's steady military buildup. Against this background, policies should be made from the standpoint of how to maintain East Asian stability and Japan's security.

If the Hatoyama administration continues to defer decisions on the U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ) realignment and other issues, a sense of distrust will grow on both sides. This will result in a "weak and equal Japan-U.S. relationship."

Remaining trustworthy

Akita: There is concern that if things go on like this, the Japan-U.S. relationship may deteriorate further.

Kitaoka: The emergence of differences of opinion during a change of administration is inevitable. I have heard the criticisms of the Hatoyama administration by the Republicans in the U.S. I think their opinions are a bit exaggerated.

Akita: You are saying that it is not only in Japan that a certain amount of confusion arises during a period of change in administration?

Kitaoka: The United States itself has without qualms revoked agreements it has signed several times in the past. It did not join the League of Nations after World War I, and the U.S. sometimes acted unreasonably during the period of Japan-U.S. trade friction in the 1980s. However, Japan should more faithfully abide by past agreements and remain more trustworthy than the U.S. The fact is Japan cannot do things that are unacceptable for the U.S. to do as a superpower.

Akita: The top pending issue is the U.S. forces' Futenma base in Okinawa. How should this be tackled?

Kitaoka: It is truly a shame that the people of Okinawa have to bear the burden. However, geopolitically speaking, Okinawa is in a

critical location. When Commodore Perry came to Japan toward the end of the Edo Period, he first set eyes on Okinawa and attempted to bring it under America's sway. From Okinawa's viewpoint, its location is truly unfortunate. Therefore, the Japanese government should treat Okinawa with the utmost respect and provide various forms of aid to compensate for the burden imposed on the local

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communities. The Prime Minister should visit Okinawa personally to persuade the people to accept the replacement base.

Akita: There seems to be a mood in the Hatoyama administration that since the government has changed, it is a matter of course that policies should also change.

Kitaoka: Generally speaking, a review of policies will naturally take place after a change of administration. However, it is absurd to regard doing things differently from the previous administration as a goal in itself. It is hoped that decisions will be made based on what is the best option under the present circumstances.

Make constitutional interpretation the key

Akita: It is also necessary to accept the corresponding responsibility in order to achieve equality.

Kitaoka: In the first place, Japan does not play a role equal to the U.S. under the bilateral security treaty. Japan provides military bases to compensate for such inequality. That is the reason why some Japanese think that the bases are not needed during peacetime. On the other hand, the U.S. side thinks that why should we shed blood in an emergency for a big country like Japan? We need to look at the big picture.

Akita: What needs to be done in concrete terms?

Kitaoka: It is necessary for Japan to play a bigger role in supporting the U.S. forces' operations in order to preserve peace and stability in Japan and East Asian. For this purpose, a certain degree of revision of the constitutional interpretation banning the exercise of the right of collective self-defense will be the key. Another important thing is that Japan should further beef up its defense capability. Doing so will bring it one step closer to a close and equal relationship.

(The Japan-U.S. relationship is in flux with many issues pending. How should the bilateral relationship be steered? We interviewed experts in Japan, the U.S., China, and South Korea ahead of U.S. President Barack Obama's first visit to Japan on Nov. 12.)

(Part one of an ongoing series)

(16) Base representatives apologize to Tsugaru city for car accident in Nakadomari that killed driver; "Vehicle is connected with the U.S. military"

TOO NIIPPO (Page 25) (Full)  
November 3, 2009

Late in the night on Oct. 30, a car struck the rail of the Tsugaru Ohashi Bridge on the prefectural road in Tamogi-Wakamiya in the town of Nakadomari and burst into flames. The driver died. In this connection, Capt. Kirby J. Atwell and others of the U.S. Army Shariki Communications Site in the city of Tsugaru visited the city office on Nov. 2 and offered an apology to Mayor Hiroyoshi Fukushima, saying, "Although the man in question has yet to be identified, the vehicle that caused the accident was driven by a person connected with the base." Although the Goshogawara Police Station had indicated that the identification of the man in question was still under investigation, it acknowledged on Oct. 30 that the

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vehicle was connected with the U.S. military.

According to the police station, the man's body was badly disfigured, making identification difficult. The police station also indicated that a DNA test is being conducted and that the man would be identified within several days.

"As we saw the license plate, we thought that someone connected with (the base) was involved in the accident, so we have come here to offer an apology," Capt. Atwell said. "The investigation is continuing, so we cannot answer any questions about the person who died. We would like to enhance safety measures in the future." In response, Mayor Fukushima said: "I have asked the U.S. base not to cause any further traffic accidents. I request that people connected with the base thoroughly comply with the law and raise their awareness of traffic safety."

(17) USFJ "civilian employee" dies in car accident, suspected of driving under the influence of alcohol

TOO NIPPO (Page 25) (Full)  
November 5, 2009

The Goshogawara Police Station announced on Nov. 4 that the man who died in the accident late in the night of Oct. 30 on the prefectural highway in Tamogi, Nakadomari-machi (Aomori Prefecture), in which a car crashed into the railing of the Tsugaru bridge and went up in flames, was Greg A. Williams, 48, a civilian employee of the U.S. Army's Shariki Communications Site. The police also announced that traces of alcohol were detected in Mr. Williams's body. Another male civilian employee of the Shariki base had just been arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI) in July. Local citizens are saying that it's a miracle there have been no serious accidents until now and that such incidents will undermine the relationship of trust.

According to the Goshogawara police, the body was badly disfigured, and the prefectural police's criminal investigation laboratory finally identified the deceased as Mr. Williams through DNA examination on Nov. 3. It was also learned that he was burned to death.

Furthermore, it was also learned that an alcohol level well above the 0.15 milligram per liter of breath, at which a driver is considered to be DUI, was detected in his blood. The Goshogawara Police Station is continuing with its investigation, with the possibility of filing charges for violation of the Road Traffic Law provisions on safe driving.

In response to Too Nippo's queries regarding the fact that Mr. Williams was a civilian employee of the U.S. military base and that he was DUI, the Shariki Communications Site said: "We are unable to comment because we have not received an official report."

The U.S. Army's Shariki Communications Site has been in operation for only three years from September 2006. In April 2008, a male civilian employee was charged with trespassing, and another male civilian employee was involved in a car crash on the prefectural highway in Kizukuri, Tsugaru City in July and was arrested for DUI.

Shiro Hayashi, head of the neighborhood association in the Shariki district, said angrily: "A DUI incident again? It is extremely

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regrettable because we are trying to build friendly relations with the U.S. forces. We hope they will exercise the greatest caution."

A man, 50, who witnessed the accident on the prefectural highway in July, was appalled at the latest incident. He said: "U.S. military people drive recklessly at high speed. I think it's a miracle there have been no serious accidents until now."

In light of the recent incident, a representative from the Shariki base visited the Tsugaru City Hall on Nov. 2 to apologize to Mayor Hiroyoshi Fukushima. However, the city's general affairs chief Arihiko Yamamoto says: "It is truly regrettable that this has caused great anxiety among the citizens and undermined the relationship of trust. We would like to demand that they obey traffic rules and make

thorough efforts to raise traffic safety consciousness."

(18) Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano comments on  
USFJ-related hit-and-run incident in Yomitan, Okinawa

MAINICHI (Page 10) (Full)  
Evening, November 9, 2009

Shinichiro Nishida

At a news conference on the morning of Nov. 9, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano indicated that since the car believed to be involved in the hit-and-run incident in Sobe, Yomitan Village, Okinawa Prefecture, has a Y number plate, the owner "must be related to the U.S. forces." He also said, "It is extremely regrettable if this is (an incident) involving a person related to U.S. forces."

(19) Man found dead in Yomitan; Hit-and-run involving a U.S. military vehicle?

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 1) (Full)  
November 9, 2009

On Nov. 7 a man with blood on his head was found dead in a wooded area alongside a street in Sobe, Yomitan Village. Kadena police who were investigating the man's death concluded on Nov. 8 that he was run down by a hit-and-run driver from shards of automobile glass strewn in the area where the body was found. Concluding that it is highly possible that a U.S. military vehicle brought to a repair shop near the site after the man's body was found caused the accident, the police impounded the vehicle. This was learned through interviews with investigation sources.

According to those sources, the U.S. military vehicle, which is likely to be the hit-and-run car, is a white passenger car with a smashed windshield. The Kadena police are attempting to identify the person who brought the vehicle to the repair shop, while conducting an investigation that includes an inquiry placed with the U.S. military. The Okinawa prefectural police will conduct next week a DNA test to see whether the hair that adhered to the windshield is that of the deceased.

Meanwhile, the man was later identified by a relative as Masakazu Hokama, 66, a resident in Yomitan Village. A forensic autopsy disclosed the cause of his death was the fracture of the cervical collar.

The wooded area where Hokama's body was found is located three to

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five meters from the road along the former site of Yomitan auxiliary airport near the U.S. military's Torii Station. Few people pass through that area, where there are only scattered apartment buildings.

Hokama's wake was held by his relatives at his home on the evening of Nov. 8. A man in his 50's said in a low voice, "What happened to him?" According to the man, Hokama enjoyed taking a walk every day, and from around 5:00 am he set off in the direction of Zanza point.

ROOS